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Testimony in Support of HB 5241 AN ACT REQUIRING A STUDY OF A PAY-IT-FORWARD COLLEGE PAYMENT PLAN.

Senator Cassano, Representative Willis, and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

Thank you for holding a hearing on the Pay-It-Forward concept, and for the opportunity to discuss how to pay for higher education in this state more broadly.

With the rise of tuition we've seen changes in our lives and the lives of others. In recent years we have seen economic depression on state and federal levels. With structural unemployment having yet to significantly improve, state universities and community colleges have served as a hub to provide lower cost education to individuals who may need to finish their degree, keep their jobs, or simply can't afford anything else.

Being enrolled in New Haven's Gateway Community College, I know this well. When I graduated high school, I was getting ready to leave in order to attend University of Hartford as a freshman. However, with both of my parents becoming unemployed, I was forced to withdraw which led me to attend Gateway, and has left me nearly \$3,000 in debt so far, and I'm in my second semester. Having to work to pay rent and other bills is enough, and trying to figure out strategic ways to cover my debt at age nineteen is ridiculous and overwhelming, but the truth is, there are students for whom my debt is just a fraction of theirs. The nature of this crisis is cyclical and plaguing, and with public colleges' critical role served in the community there has to be a set productive measures.

These schools provide learning for individuals who haven't been in the classroom for decades. Veterans hoping to pursue education to find work. Students trying to figure out what fields assuage their curiosities. Students in unfavorable financial situations. Public institutions of higher education makes this all possible, but with our fiscal realities, these possibilities for enrichment and amelioration are becoming inhibited.

Accessibility to education is an issue that resonates. In order to thrive in consumer spending, we need to cultivate an environment in which people can actually obtain a disposable income. However, in furtherance of that goal there has to be a way for people to have careers that will allow them to do that very thing.

With that being said, accessibility is a top priority. What it makes possible, let alone the close interrelated relationships it shares with many facets of our economy. But this cannot change with just one bill, but just one bill can set precedence to improvement.

In 2012, 61% of Connecticut students graduated with an average of \$28,000 in loan debt. Simultaneously, not only is tuition rising, but interest rates are variable and are expected to rise even further. How would a graduate within the low income bracket expect to pay rent, utilities, purchase food, and make monthly payments when an already large sum grows even more immense?

The implications of increased student debt throughout the next few years surpasses our current difficulties. "Pay it Forward" could provide an opportunity to reduce this burden of debt and increase consumer spending, so we should study it as one of the innovative ways to address these issues. Changing the language should be considered as well. "Upon graduation" and "upon leaving" are two completely different things. "Upon leaving" allows more stability and holds students accountable for their financial obligations. Yet, the study should not be limited to just the "Pay it Forward" concept, it should be broadened and more inclusive, because in this circumstance, all potential solutions should be considered.

Thank you for your time,

Hasani Gunn